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DEPT FOR PRM AND NEA  
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SUBJECT: PRM A/S DEWEY DISCUSSES PALESTINIAN AND IRAQI  
REFUGEES DURING VISIT TO JORDAN

REF: Amman 4337

1. (SBU) Summary: During a July 16-17 visit to Jordan, PRM A/S Dewey met with the Director-General of the GOJ's Department of Palestinian Affairs and the Camp Improvement Committee at Wihdat refugee camp, visited UNRWA installations and met with UNRWA Deputy ComGen Karen AbuZayd. The Palestinian refugees urged the U.S. to continue its involvement in Israeli/Palestinian roadmap implementation and support the right of return as outlined in UN resolutions. AbuZayd reported that UNRWA would assist in UNHCR's registration of Palestinian refugees in Iraq and also hopes to register qualifying refugees with UNRWA. In a separate meeting with GOJ Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, A/S Dewey outlined U.S. views on the repatriation of Iraqi refugees. The GOJ repeated previous assurances that it would not organize Iraqi returns until conditions improved inside Iraq but noted that its first priority for returns would be the 2,000 Palestinian and Iraqi refugees currently at the Jordanian-Iraqi border. Embassy-arranged press interviews gave A/S Dewey an opportunity to highlight U.S. humanitarian engagement. End summary.

2. (U) PRM A/S Gene Dewey visited Jordan July 16-17, prior to beginning a joint tour of Iraq with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. PRM/ANE Deputy Director Larry Bartlett, Charge d'Affaires David Hale, Regional Refcoord Joan Polaschik and Refugee Assistant Ibrahim Bisharat accompanied A/S Dewey in his Jordan meetings.

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Palestinian Refugees Urge Continued  
U.S. Humanitarian and Political Roles  
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3. (U) A/S Dewey began his meetings with a call on GOJ Department of Palestinian Affairs Director General Abdulkarim Abulhaija and the Camp Improvement Committee of Wihdat refugee camp. Although the committee was grateful for the United States' long-standing, strong financial support to UNRWA, its members urged A/S Dewey to increase U.S. support to the agency. With a rapidly growing Palestinian refugee population and declining donor support for UNRWA, the Wihdat committee worries that UNRWA will be forced to cut services, leaving a vulnerable population still further exposed. In Wihdat camp, for example, 500 families have an annual income of less than USD 80 and depend on assistance from UNRWA and the Zakat committee.

4. (U) The committee told A/S Dewey that continued U.S. political engagement on the peace process was just as important as continued financial support to UNRWA. The real solution to the refugees' humanitarian problems would be full implementation of the right of return as outlined in UN resolutions. A/S Dewey responded that the parties themselves agreed that the right of return should be addressed only in final status talks, eliciting several impassioned interventions on the centrality of the right of return to lasting, comprehensive peace.

5. (U) A/S Dewey also visited a women's program center in Wihdat refugee camp, where he observed women's vocational training programs and received a briefing on UNRWA services from Jordan Field Director Bill Lee. Lee told A/S Dewey that UNRWA services and standards (its historically superb school exam scores, for example) were dropping due to chronic underfunding. Lee added that UNRWA's 1999 staff rules (which decreased staff salaries significantly) had severely impaired the agency's ability to hire and retain qualified staff. Lee then accompanied A/S Dewey on a visit to UNRWA's Amir Hassan health center, a dilapidated, overcrowded clinic in east Amman that treats 108 patients per day. UNRWA seeks USD 214,000 in special project funding to replace the clinic with a new, more accessible clinic.

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UNRWA Deputy ComGen Addresses GAO Investigation,  
Extraordinary Geneva Meeting and Palestinians in Iraq  
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16. (SBU) In a separate meeting with UNRWA Deputy Commissioner General Karen AbuZayd, A/S Dewey and Bartlett briefed AbuZayd on the U.S. General Accounting Office's ongoing investigation of UNRWA's compliance with section 301(c) of the Foreign Assistance Act. AbuZayd said UNRWA would welcome a GAO field visit during the week of August 24 and was eager to facilitate the GAO's work. They also discussed UNRWA's planned extraordinary meeting in Geneva (ref). AbuZayd pledged that UNRWA would not include UNRWA's future as an agenda item at the meeting. While UNRWA hoped to address more strategic issues such as the international community's crisis recovery plan for the West Bank and Gaza or the impact of chronic underfunding on UNRWA operations, the agency's leadership recognized that it could not take on political topics in the extraordinary meeting. Refcoord urged UNRWA to hold technical-level planning meetings before the September major donors meeting, to ensure that all stakeholders were aware of and comfortable with UNRWA's plans for the extraordinary Geneva meeting.

17. (SBU) AbuZayd also briefed A/S Dewey on UNRWA's plans to send a three-person technical team to Iraq, to assist UNHCR -- at its request -- in the registration of Palestinian refugees in Iraq. AbuZayd said the team's mandate initially would be limited to assisting UNHCR in the registration of Palestinians for UNHCR assistance but that the agency ultimately would like to register as UNRWA refugees those Palestinians in Iraq who meet the definition of an UNRWA refugee (Palestinians who lived in British Mandate Palestine between 1946 and 1948 and lost their homes and means of livelihood as the result of conflict). Under UNRWA regulations, however, UNRWA is able to conduct new registrations only in its five fields of operations - meaning that Palestinian refugees must physically be present in Gaza, West Bank, Jordan, Syria or Lebanon. AbuZayd said UNRWA was considering how to handle the Iraqi population in light of these regulations.

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Iraqi Refugees and Return Programs  
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18. (SBU) A/S Dewey briefed GOJ Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Shaher Bak on U.S. plans for large-scale, assisted returns of Iraqi refugees to Iraq. Both the U.S. and UNHCR agree that such returns should not be conducted until conditions in Iraq improve. UNHCR's successful return of several hundred stranded in Dubai had encouraged the U.S. and UNHCR to resume planning for the first returns from Saudi Arabia's Rafha refugee camp. Consideration would next be given to organized returns of Iraqi refugees from Iran and then from other neighboring states.

19. (SBU) Bak responded that the GOJ's first priority for returns was to solve the situation at the border, returning to Iraq the 1,000 Iranians Kurds and 900 Palestinians who have been seeking in asylum in Jordan since mid-April (ref b). However, the GOJ agreed with the U.S. and UNHCR on their return policy and would not organize Iraqi returns until conditions improved inside Iraq. Bak also reported that initial post-war spontaneous returns had leveled off, with Iraqis now "coming and going" but no general trend toward returns. The GOJ continues to enforce its previous halt on deportations but would review this decision on a quarterly basis. Bak was very interested in U.S. plans to improve security and socio-economic conditions in Iraq and asked for a readout of A/S Dewey's upcoming joint trip to Iraq with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The Charge promised the Embassy would provide a briefing.

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Press Coverage of A/S Dewey's Visit  
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110. (U) PA Amman arranged interviews for A/S Dewey with the Arabic language daily "Al Dustoor" and the English-language daily "The Jordan Times," providing an opportunity to highlight for a wider audience ongoing U.S. support for Palestinian refugees and other issues of interest in the Middle East such as U.S. assistance to refugee communities in Iraq and Afghanistan. On July 17, Al Dustoor ran its interview under the headline, "U.S. Assistant Secretary of State: Solution to the Issue of Palestinian Refugees Part of the Road Map." The article emphasized A/S Dewey's remarks urging progress on the Roadmap as the best means to solve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians; calling for greater support for UNRWA programs by European and Arab states; expressing concern over the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon; and explaining that, with regard to Iraqi refugees seeking to return to their country, the U.S. goal is to improve the security situation and strengthen UNHCR's capabilities, so that Iraqis can eventually begin to return to their country in large numbers. He noted that the international community learned much from the Afghanistan experience, where the U.S. campaign to bring down the Taliban regime led to the return

of over 2 million old-caseload refugees. A/S Dewey also highlighted the relatively low numbers of refugees or displaced persons as a result of Operation Iraqi Freedom, attributing it to U.S. and international efforts to prepare for and head off such a humanitarian crisis.

11. (U) A/S Dewey took advantage of a question regarding increased security measures directed towards Arab and Muslim visitors and migrants to the United States to stress that while the U.S. must take measures to ensure a safe homeland, it will remain an immigrant nation and continue to welcome and need the talents of immigrants from all over the world. The Jordan Times ran a brief item 7/17 -- as did all Jordan's dailies -- regarding A/S Dewey's visit to Whidat refugee camp.

12. (U) A/S Dewey cleared this message.

13. (U) CPA Baghdad minimize considered.  
HALE